



Focus

Open Burning: Prohibited Materials

Background

Until recently, burning was a common way to dispose of trash such as paper, cardboard and junk mail. Although burning of garbage has been prohibited since 1974, some people still consider it an acceptable practice. However, with increasing population growth, burning of any prohibited materials such as garbage or plastic has become recognized as a significant health risk and public nuisance.

Prohibited materials

State law (Chapter 70.94 RCW) banned outdoor burning of certain materials in 1974. Those prohibited materials include:

- Garbage
- Rubber products
- Asphalt
- Any substance that emits dense smoke or obnoxious odors (other than natural vegetation)
- Petroleum products
- Plastics
- Dead animals

In January 1993, rules were adopted adding the following specific materials which are also prohibited:

- Paper
- Treated wood
- Metal
- Cardboard
- Construction debris
- Any substance which when burned releases toxic emissions, dense smoke or obnoxious odors (other than natural vegetation)

The only material that may be legally burned in an outdoor fire is dry, natural vegetation.

Note: Regardless of the material, outdoor burning is banned altogether in some areas and is prohibited during certain times of the year in others. Check with your local air pollution control authority or fire protection district.

Burn barrels

Burn barrels are not allowed. The design of burn barrels restricts the flow of oxygen to the fire, resulting in excessive amounts of smoke. In addition, these fires are a hazard because embers can smolder and drift long after the flames have died.

Open burning of natural vegetation

The 1991 Clean Air Washington Act protects air quality in Washington. One way it does this is by requiring new regulations for open burning. Following state law, the regulation bans open burning in areas that do not meet federal health-based air quality standards (nonattainment areas) for pollutants released by open burning (particulate matter and carbon monoxide). The rule establishes conditions for when burning can occur, and requires permits for burning in areas of the state where burning is still allowed.

Alternatives to burning

Consider chipping large prunings and mulching or composting your food and garden waste. Recycle paper, plastic, glass, aluminum and metal. For information on recycling call 1-800-RECYCLE or your county's solid waste division. For waste that can't be recycled, use a garbage collection service or haul to the local landfill. Disposing in a landfill is not an ideal alternative; the best way to handle the problem of garbage is to create less of it. Buy durable products rather than disposable ones and look for recycled products and packaging.

For more information

For more information on prohibited materials or open burning, contact the following Ecology staff:

Kary Peterson (509) 329-3574
Air Quality Program

In western Washington, contact your local air pollution control agency.

If you have special accommodation needs, please call Judy Beitel at (360) 407-6878 (voice) or 1-800-833-6388 (TTY).